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Promoting social integration through social inclusion

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 68/131 of 18 December 2013 on promoting social integration through social inclusion. It builds on the findings of the four previous reports on social integration and provides an account of national efforts and the initiatives of the United Nations system aimed at promoting the civic, social, economic and political participation of persons belonging to groups or in situations in which they are vulnerable or marginalized.

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I. Introduction

1. At the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen from 6 to 12 March 1995, the international community recognized the importance of social integration and resolved to work towards creating a society for all, where people can fully exercise their rights and responsibilities and contribute to society on an equal basis.

2. Twenty years later, the goal of creating an inclusive society for all still remains largely unfulfilled, as many are still not able to fully participate in the civil, political, social and economic life of their countries. Many people remain excluded based on their gender, age, race, caste, ethnicity, disability or other characteristics and, as a result, have limited, lower-level access to health services, education and employment. Social exclusion therefore still remains a major obstacle to the achievement of development goals.

3. Encouragingly, however, there is growing recognition all over the world that dedicated policies and programmes have a positive impact on social inclusion, particularly of excluded groups.[1]

4. The present report is the fifth in the series relating to social inclusion, social integration and social cohesion. It aims towards building on the findings of the previous reports, which provided detailed background on those concepts and focused on practical strategies in their support.[2] The last report (A/68/169), issued in 2013, reviewed recent developments relating to social protection, education and institution-building and policy coherence as strategies for achieving social integration.

5. This report has been prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 68/131, in which the Assembly, inter alia, stressed that Member States should prioritize the creation of a "society for all" based on respect for all human rights and the principles of equality among individuals, access to basic social services and promotion of the active participation of every member of society — in particular those belonging to groups or in situations in which they vulnerable or marginalized — in all aspects of life, including civic, social, economic and political activities, as well as in decision-making processes. Section two of the report offers an overview of regional approaches to social integration. Section three offers an account of recent national efforts aimed at promoting the civic, social, economic and political participation of persons belonging to groups or in situations in which they are vulnerable or marginalized. Specific forms of participation include economic participation through employment; participation in policy design and service provision; participation of youth, older persons and persons with disabilities; and access to services and social protection, as well as involvement in urban planning and budgeting.

6. Section four focuses on national efforts aimed at reducing inequalities through non-discrimination, poverty reduction and education and institutional arrangements conducive to social inclusion and social integration.

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[1] See World Bank, *Inclusion Matters: The Foundation for Shared Prosperity* (Washington, D.C., 2013).

[2] The previous reports were issued under the symbols E/CN.5/2009/2, E/CN.5/2010/2, E/CN.5/2011/2 and A/68/169.

7. The country-level information presented in the report is based on the responses of Member States to the note verbale transmitted by the Secretariat in February 2015 pursuant to the terms of General Assembly resolution 68/131. The Secretariat received a total of 10 responses, from the Governments of Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, the Dominican Republic, Lithuania, Mexico, Morocco, Peru, Romania, the United States of America and Saudi Arabia.

8. Section five of the report reviews the activities of entities of the United Nations system in support of social integration. The final section presents several conclusions and offers recommendations for advancing social integration through social inclusion.

II. Regional approaches to social integration

9. While regional approaches to social inclusion, integration and cohesion differ in terms of their scope and application, improving access to basic services, social protection and employment remains central to advancing social inclusion in most regions. Special measures for reducing inequalities and improving the situation of vulnerable groups, including through changes made in legislative frameworks so as to enable the outlawing of different forms of discrimination, are also part of overall social integration efforts in many parts of the world.

10. Access to education, health care and housing and equality before the law are at the core of social integration in Africa pursuant to the terms of the African Common Position on Social Integration, adopted by the African Union Conference of Ministers in Charge of Social Development in Member States of the African Union at its first session, held in Windhoek from 27 to 31 October 2008. The African Common Position calls for member States to develop comprehensive socioeconomic policies, improve coordination in the public sector so as to overcome fragmentation and piecemeal programming in order to deal with social challenges, improve democratic governance and respect for human rights, and facilitate involvement of civil society organizations in design and implementation of programmes and policies.

11. The social and economic inclusion of older persons has recently been a particular focus of attention in Africa. The African Union Conference of Ministers in Charge of Social Development has submitted a draft protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights,[3] concerning the rights of older persons in Africa, for adoption and signature by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union. Articles of the protocol address issues including the elimination of discrimination against older persons, access to justice and equal protection before the law, the right to make decisions, protection from abuse and harmful traditional practices, care and support and access to health-care and educational services and credit.

12. In the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) regions, social protection is considered key to achieving social integration. As indicated in a recent analysis of the various forms and pathways of inequality in Asia and the Pacific, inasmuch as market-led growth alone has not been sufficient to achieve inclusive

[3] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1520, No. 26363.

and sustainable development, enhancing social protection can be an effective measure for reducing inequality and contributing to social integration.[4]

13. In the ESCAP region, social protection is viewed as a means of achieving social integration, as it contributes to social and political stability within countries,[5] while inequality is perceived as an impediment to the integration of economic growth, social inclusion and environmental sustainability. Despite this common understanding, inequalities in income and in access to health care and education are still common in the region.

14. In particular, there are still pockets of deprivation in access to social services in several countries of the region, where lower-income groups have limited access to health-care services and education compared with higher-income groups. Enhancing access to services and social protection is a measure that can be taken by countries in the region to tackle inequalities and enhance social inclusion.[6]

15. ESCWA emphasizes that in order to combat poverty and promote equity, equality and human rights, social protection should be woven into an inclusive and comprehensive participatory social policy.[7] ESCWA member States utilize a number of participatory frameworks when developing public policies, including a social protection policy. For instance, Governments in the region have been establishing social observatories comprising civil society organizations and academics to assist in the formulation of policies based on socioeconomic data.[7]

16. Throughout the region, access to social protection services is seen as ensuring that the benefits of economic progress are shared more equitably. Although Arab countries all have some form of social protection schemes, those schemes tend to be highly fragmented and are perceived as approaches offering temporary social assistance rather than as components of an integrated social protection strategy.[7] Social protection schemes in the region comprise several programmes that are narrow in scope and run in piecemeal fashion by the private and public sectors and non-governmental organizations, with only one third of the population of the region of the Middle East and Northern Africa covered by formal social protection systems.[7]

17. As indicated in the recent ESCWA analysis, it is important for the region to educate citizens on their rights to social protection. The beneficiaries of social protection programmes should not view themselves as passive recipients of subsidies and services, but rather as active citizens who are able to demand a fairer distribution of resources. Other tools for involving people in decision-making on social protection include national policy feedback dialogues; strategic partnerships involving different stakeholders designed to formulate and implement more responsive social protection policies; and observatories for participatory and informed policymaking to ensure that programmes and initiatives are better targeted.[7]

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[4] See ESCAP, working paper entitled "Confronting inequalities in Asia and the Pacific: the role of social protection", December, 2014.

[5] ESCAP, note by the secretariat on confronting rising inequalities in Asia and the Pacific: trends and opportunities in the context of the development agenda beyond 2015 (E/ESCAP/CSD(3)/1), 13 June 2014.

[6] ESCAP, "Confronting inequalities in Asia and the Pacific".

[7] ESCWA, "Participation and social protection in the Arab region" (E/ESCWA/SDD/2014/Technical Paper.7) (5 November 2014), p. 22.

18. Although the countries in the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) region have made significant progress in advancing social inclusion through the improved exercise of people's civil and political rights, genuine participation of groups that are traditionally marginalized, owing to their socioeconomic status, gender or ethnic origin, is still limited. High levels of inequality and exclusion are also linked to difficulties associated with the realization of people's socioeconomic rights.[8]

19. *Americas Quarterly*, a magazine dedicated to policy analysis and debate on economic, finance, social development and politics in the western hemisphere, publishes the Social Inclusion Index, which ranks countries in the Americas in terms of their potential to improve social mobility, a range of rights and social policies, and access to formal jobs, as well as public attitudes and behaviour.[9] The 2014 Index report noted that patterns of political, economic and social exclusion are based on structural inefficiencies which are difficult to change in the short term. Additional challenges lie in the lack of institutions dedicated to social inclusion, and a legacy of attitudes towards race and gender and exclusionary laws.

20. The General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) devoted its forty-fourth regular session (Asunción, 2-5 June, 2014) to the topic "Development with social inclusion". In its final declaration, the member countries of OAS pledged to commit their efforts to eradicating hunger and poverty, in particular extreme poverty; combating inequity, inequality, discrimination and social exclusion; and increasing equitable access to health services, as well as to quality and inclusive education.[10] The declaration encouraged the adoption of intersectoral public policies on social protection and inclusion so as to strengthen respect for human rights. Similarly, the adoption of measures for the full and effective participation in society of all persons was encouraged. The declaration further recognized that universal access to quality and inclusive education, with special attention given to individuals and groups in vulnerable situations, contributes to strengthening social inclusion as well as the development of the individual, economic development and development of democratic institutions.

21. The European Union Europe 2020 Strategy includes the Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion and the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs.[11] Active social inclusion, together with employment, innovation, education and climate/energy objectives, forms part of an initiative that sets targets aimed at lifting 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion and increasing employment of the working-age population to 75 per cent.

22. In the European Union, active inclusion is defined as "enabling every citizen, notably the most disadvantaged, to fully participate in society, including having a job".[12] Strategies to ensure full participation for all European Union citizens involve adequate income support and access to job opportunities; facilitating people's access

[8] Organization of American States, *Inequality and Social Inclusion in the Americas: 14 Essays*, 2nd. ed. (Washington, D.C., 2011). Available from http://www.oas.org/docs/desigualdad/LIBRO-DESIGUALDAD-INGLES.pdf.

[9] See http://www.americasquarterly.org/charticles/socialinclusionindex2014/.

[10] See http://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=S-005/14.

[11] See http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=750.

[12] See http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1059&langId=en.

to labour markets; confronting in-work poverty; forestalling disincentives to work; and supporting people's access to quality services.

23. National plans for social inclusion in the European Union reflect national political, social and economic priorities, as set by member States, as well as differences in policy dynamics.

24. Social integration efforts as directed towards the Roma population, one of the most discriminated-against groups in Europe, have received special attention. A regional political commitment, the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, has aimed at improving the socioeconomic status and social inclusion of the Roma population, with a particular focus on health, education, employment and housing. Similarly, the European Union Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies by 2020, launched by the European Commission in 2011, requests that all European Union members develop and implement targeted strategies for promoting integration of the Roma in the areas of health, housing, education and employment. Governments are required to adhere to, and implement the commitments already made through international instruments centred around social inclusion, poverty, health and discrimination.[13]

25. Responding to the recent immigration crisis in Europe, the European Commission has called for mandatory national quotas with respect to relocating new immigrants throughout Europe. The proposal — which has raised considerable concern — aims towards relocating migrants based on countries' population size, gross domestic product (GDP), unemployment rate and existing number of asylum seekers.[14] The recently proposed European agenda on migration also emphasizes that a successful migration policy requires effective integration policies; under the agenda, funding would be extended for targeted initiatives designed to improve language and professional skills, and access to services and the labour market, as well as inclusive education.[15]

III. Social integration efforts at the national level

A. Promoting active participation of people in civic, social, economic and political life

26. While Member States have long focused their efforts on improving the employability of young people against a backdrop of pervasive unemployment and underemployment, they are increasingly adopting measures aimed at promoting the economic participation of older persons and persons with disabilities.

27. Governments are also recognizing that involving individuals, communities and civil society organizations in policy design and service provision is essential to reversing exclusionary processes. Additionally, there is growing evidence that policymaking processes informed by a knowledge of individuals and communities often lead to better outcomes. Examples of such participatory policymaking and

[13] For further examples of national strategies of European Union member States, see sect. III.

[14] See http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32693737.

[15] See http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/communication_on_the_european_agenda_on_migration_en.pdf.

monitoring exercises involve young people and older persons as well as persons with disabilities, including persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

28. While affordable and accessible transportation is commonly considered critical to the social inclusion of persons with disabilities and older persons, the experiences of a growing number of cities point to its importance for other disadvantaged social groups and communities at large.

29. Also, more cities worldwide are experimenting with innovative approaches to social inclusion policies such as participatory budgeting.

Economic participation through employment

30. Labour-market participation is a cornerstone of social integration strategies in many countries. Efforts to stimulate job creation and improve employability-related skills through training constitute key steps towards greater economic participation. Economic inclusion of specific groups through employment, especially the long-term unemployed, and young people, as well as persons with disabilities, is also often part of social integration initiatives.

31. Peru's economic inclusion policy aims at allowing people to earn adequate income for themselves and their households and increase their food security independently of Government-provided monetary assistance. The strategy focuses on developing income-generating opportunities for poor families in rural areas through economic diversification, skills improvement and access to services.

32. In the European Union member countries, as noted above, enabling every citizen, notably the most disadvantaged, to fully participate in society, including having a job, is part of active inclusion. Measures designed to accomplish this task include adequate income support and assistance with respect to obtaining employment, participating in inclusive labour markets and access to quality services.[16]

33. The aim of Lithuania's National Action Plan for Increasing Social Inclusion 2014-2020 is to reduce poverty and social exclusion through its focus on active employment measures and development of social services as well as cash assistance with specific targets.

34. Many Governments focus on facilitating job opportunities for specific vulnerable groups. In Bulgaria, they include unemployed youth up to 29 years of age, adults over 50 years of age, persons with disabilities, the Roma ethnic minority and the long-term unemployed. Lithuania's Youth Guarantee initiative aims towards ensuring that all young people (under age 28) receive an offer of employment, or continuing education, including apprenticeship or work placement within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

35. In Azerbaijan, efforts are under way to facilitate access to employment for youth, vocational training for internally displaced persons and refugees, promotion of self-employment among youth and vocational training courses. Moreover, its Social Protection Strengthening project, implemented jointly by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population and the World Bank aims, inter alia, at

[16] See http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1059&langId=en.

improving employment services through labour orientation activities and development of professional standards and module training programmes for youth.

36. Similar programmes are implemented in developing countries. For example, Morocco's National Agency for the Promotion of Employment and Skills is a public service entity which assists employers in matching job seekers with employment opportunities. As an active intermediary on the labour market, the National Agency is tasked with organizing and implementing programmes for the promotion of skilled jobs. It consists of 78 agencies located in different regions of the country which provide assistance with respect to self-employment projects and professional capacity development of young entrepreneurs.

37. Financial inclusion is part of overall economic inclusion. In the Dominican Republic, a variety of economic and social inclusion programmes are provided with support, including special programmes whose aim is to improve poor households' access to financial education and services as well as microcredit. Under the overall programme Progresando con Solidaridad (Progressing with Solidarity), launched in 2012, over 3,000 heads of households benefited from financial education and improved their knowledge of and skills in personal finance management and use of financial services. Similarly, several financial inclusion programmes targeting social programmes beneficiaries, older persons and women living in rural areas are part of overall social inclusion strategies in Peru.

Participation in policy design and service provision

38. Over the years, the General Assembly has encouraged Member States to mainstream social integration objectives into social policy making through promoting the participation of persons belonging to groups or in situations in which they are vulnerable or marginalized, in planning, implementing and monitoring processes. Fittingly, diverse consultation frameworks on social policy have been created to ensure better public participation in policy design and implementation.

39. The National Development Plan of Mexico, 2013-2018, was established through civic consultation, with the participation of researchers and academic experts, non-governmental organizations and general public.

40. In Saudi Arabia, active participation is promoted through social development centres and committees focusing on family, childhood, youth, women, domestic production, social ties, family counselling, awareness and education, and persons with disabilities.

41. In South Africa, the National Department of Health organized wide-ranging public consultations on the new National Health Insurance scheme, with the participation of medical scheme administrators, representatives of the pharmaceutical industry, professional associations, statutory bodies, government departments, academia, civil society and members of Parliament. A major outcome of the consultation process was the introduction in 2011 of the essential health-care provision, which provides access to health care to all citizens and residents regardless of employment status or ability to contribute to the National Health Insurance scheme.[17]

[17] See http://www.samj.org.za/index.php/samj/article/view/6601/4920.

Participation of youth, older persons and persons with disabilities

42. Some countries have taken active measures to facilitate the participation of specific groups in socioeconomic development, particularly youth, older persons and persons with disabilities.

43. Against a backdrop of pervasive unemployment and underemployment, youth constitute the largest excluded group in the Middle East and Northern Africa region. In most countries of the region, the majority of youth have few, if any, opportunities to participate in the economic development of their country which hampers economic growth, contributes to idleness, isolation and frustration and fuels social unrest.

44. Promotion of active ageing and independent living for older persons is part of overall social inclusion strategies in many countries. In the United States of America, the Older Americans Act encompasses a nutrition programme and promotes the socialization, health and well-being of older Americans, especially those in "greatest social need" as a result of disabilities, language barriers, or cultural, social or geographical isolation, due, inter alia, to racial or ethnic status.

45. In Romania, civil dialogue advisory committees for older persons, comprising representatives of Dialogue, Family and Social Solidarity County Directorates, and health insurance and pensions schemes, as well as representatives of decentralized public services of ministries and presidents of county councils of the elderly, have been operating since 2004. Older persons' representatives are consulted on draft legislation affecting issues of economic, social, medical and cultural import. The committees analyse socioeconomic challenges faced by older persons and develop proposals on how to tackle them.

46. In the United States, the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 aims towards ensuring that individuals with developmental disabilities and their families participate in the design of, and have access to, community services, individualized forms of support and other forms of assistance which promote self-determination, independence, productivity, and integration and inclusion in all facets of community life. The Act supports the National Network of University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Service. These centres are either interdisciplinary education, research and public service units of a university system, or public or not-for-profit entities associated with universities. Further, State Councils on Developmental Disabilities provide services assistance for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families, while State-level Protection and Advocacy Systems protect the legal and human rights of all persons with disabilities. In addition, Aging and Disability Resource Centers support the efforts of States to streamline access to long-term services and support options for older adults and individuals with disabilities.

Accessible transportation

47. Reliable, affordable and accessible transportation is a necessary component of meaningful inclusion for all, but even more so for persons with disabilities and older persons. Some Member States have engaged persons with disabilities and older persons in the design and planning of public transportation in urban areas so that their needs can best be met.

48. In the United States, the Transportation Research and Demonstration Program of the Administration for Community Living engaged persons with disabilities and older adults from 17 communities around the country in making suggestions on how to improve their transportation system. Seven communities received funding to implement those proposals.[18]

49. Between 2004 and 2008, the city of Medellin (Colombia) transformed its transportation system so as to render it more inclusive, with cable cars running between comunas (municipalities or councils) previously in conflict. New public spaces, including parks and museums, were also created to encourage social interaction. A large part of the city's municipal budget is committed to social investments targeting vulnerable parts of the population, including older people. Some programmes organize youth and older persons into community action groups in order to help the vulnerable advocate for their interests before municipalities (especially at the time of budgetary planning) and assist them in holding government entities accountable.

Participatory budgeting

50. Participatory budgeting has been implemented in many countries, particularly those in Latin America. In Europe, several municipalities in France, Germany, Italy, Poland and Spain have adopted participatory approaches. In order to improve service delivery to communities, local governments in sub-Saharan African countries such as Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe allow for civic participation in the budget preparation process. Similarly, some rural municipalities in India have introduced participatory budgeting schemes to ensure fair distribution of social transfers. Some studies indicate that villages that implemented mandatory village assemblies targeted the most vulnerable households more successfully, thereby limiting the capture of resources by local elites.[19]

51. Participatory budgeting, although less common in Arab countries, is seen as a helpful mechanism for making social protection mechanisms more responsive to people's needs in the region. However, institutions facilitating public participation at procedural and informal levels are needed. The effectiveness of public spending is reduced by corruption and clientelism in most countries in the region. To improve citizen participation in the Arab region, ESCWA recommends ensuring greater openness of political and governance systems; improving the enabling legal frameworks that ensure basic freedoms, such as freedom of speech and a free media; improving the capacity for participation inside and outside government; and, most importantly, ensuring the willingness and capacity of the State to make budget-related information available to the public.[19]

B. Reducing inequalities

52. Reducing inequalities has become a policy priority in much of the world as well as an integral part of the development agenda. The basis for achieving social inclusion through the reduction of inequalities lies in addressing the issues

[18] See http://www.act.gov/Programs/CIP/OCASD/Transportation/index.aspx.

[19] ESCWA, "Participation and social protection in the Arab region" (see footnote 7).

associated with the economic, social and legal underpinnings of exclusion. The lack of social integration is often associated with poverty, while poverty reduction is often seen as a pathway to social integration and greater inclusion.

53. Approaches to the social inclusion of people living in poverty are two-pronged and consist in meeting their basic needs, including health, through the direct provisions of services and/or cash transfers and empowering them through education. Provision of social protection, an integral part of the decent work agenda, has also become an essential component of the poverty reduction and social integration toolbox.

54. Increasingly, Member States are paying more attention to identifying and addressing barriers to the social and cultural participation of excluded individuals and groups, in particular the various forms of discrimination that they face. National institutions tasked with the promotion of equality and social inclusion increasingly play a significant role in providing both a better understanding of, and a more effective and integrated response to combating, social exclusion and discrimination.

Poverty reduction

55. In many countries, equalization of opportunities through social protection and conditional cash transfers for households living in poverty are part of social integration efforts.

56. In Peru, the National Strategy "Include to Grow" (Estrategia Nacional "Incluir para Crecer") focuses mainly on equalization of opportunities for children in rural areas. Its Juntos programme offers conditional cash transfers to mothers in extreme poverty based on their children's health and education status, while its National Strategy for Development and Social Inclusion focuses on child nutrition and early childhood development. Both programmes aim at preventing the intergenerational transfer of poverty.

57. In Romania, the National Strategy for Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction for 2014-2020 aims towards reducing the number of people at risk for poverty and social exclusion, in line with the targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy. The main programmatic components of the Strategy include help for vulnerable families through child allowances, provision of maternity leave (including a longer period for mothers of children with disabilities), income support and pro-work incentives for programme beneficiaries.

58. In the Dominican Republic, the programme Progressing with Solidarity combines conditional cash transfers with opportunities for educational, technical and professional development, access to information and communications technologies and creation of microenterprises, as well as opportunities for financial literacy, as a means of providing a sustainable exit from poverty. The programme's family-oriented interventions also aim at improving the health and nutrition of family members as well as educating them as citizens.

59. In Mexico, efforts to reduce poverty and inequalities are based on improving people's access to basic services, decent housing, food, education and health.

Access to services and social protection

60. In recent years, several Member States have taken steps towards extending the coverage and benefits of social protection provisions, particularly to those most in need. In Azerbaijan, the World Bank-supported Targeted Social Assistance programme provides cash benefits to low-income families, which account for approximately 10 per cent of the total population. Almost half of the recipients are children. Efforts are also being made to improve the quality of services in childcare centres so as to ensure better cognitive, emotional and physical development of children. Also in Azerbaijan, public rehabilitation centres, whose aim is to meet the social needs of children with health problems through functional assessment and activity and game therapies, have been established.

61. As mentioned, Peru's social inclusion model focuses on ensuring opportunities for the next generation through children's access to basic health, nutrition and early education.[20]

Education

62. Ensuring equal access to quality secondary education for all is often seen as one of the best social inclusion strategies for helping to reduce inequalities, while compulsory primary education is seen as a key instrument for preventing the social exclusion of disadvantaged groups.

63. New education laws in Romania have been enacted to ensure equal access to quality education so as to both facilitate the personal development of the younger generations and fulfil the socioeconomic needs of society. A central aim of the new curriculum is to ensure respect for the cultural identity of all and the rights of national minorities, and to promote intercultural dialogue. With the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), special training is provided for teachers of Roma history and language through intensive courses. The new curriculum also places emphasis on the participation and responsibility of parents.

Combating discrimination

64. Equality before the law is a fundamental principle which is enshrined in national constitutions, while inequality is increasingly seen as a major obstacle to social cohesion. As discrimination is a source of inequality and an obstacle to social integration, anti-discrimination measures have been included in social integration strategies.

65. Bulgaria's Act for Protection against Discrimination, for example, provides a solid legal basis for protection against all forms of discrimination, including with regard to education, employment and participation in decision-making processes. The Act provides for balanced participation of both men and women, as well as of persons belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, in governance and decision-making processes at national and local levels. It explicitly prohibits all types of direct or indirect discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, ethnicity, nationality, origin, religion or belief, education, political affiliation, personal or public status, disability, age, sexual orientation, family status or property status or on any other grounds, as outlined in other legal documents and international treaties ratified by Bulgaria.

[20] See http://www.midis.gob.pe/index.php/es/nuestra-institucion/sobre-midis/por-que-existimos-2.

C. National institutions for the promotion of social inclusion and social integration

66. As noted in the previous report of the Secretary-General on promoting social integration through social inclusion (A/68/169), the effective implementation of social inclusion policies is dependent, to a significant extent, on a well-functioning network of government institutions in support of local authorities and community engagement. Such institutions are also critical to engaging the most excluded and ensuring that they have a voice.

67. At the national level, social integration strategies are an integral part of social policies and are carried out by entities within the ministries covering labour, social protection, youth, older persons and/or the family. In Romania, for example, the Ministry of Labour, the Family, Social Protection and the Elderly is currently finalizing a comprehensive strategy on social inclusion and combating poverty for the period 2015-2020.[21]

68. Advisory bodies are often tasked with developing and monitoring the implementation of national inclusion plans. In Romania, the National Commission on Social Inclusion of the Interministerial Council for Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection is responsible for identifying the national priorities to be incorporated in the action plan for social inclusion, selecting the indicators to be used for monitoring purposes and overseeing the reporting process.

69. In Peru, the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion developed a National Strategy for Development and Social Inclusion; and the Intergovernmental Commission for Development and Social Inclusion was established to strengthen policy coordination.

70. In some countries, government-established bodies for the overall coordination of the national policy for the promotion, implementation and evaluation of social inclusion policies and programmes are linked to bodies concerned with equal opportunities and anti-discrimination. This is the case with regard to the Equal Opportunities, Anti-discrimination and Social Assistance Department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in Bulgaria.

71. In Saudi Arabia, national institutions for promoting social inclusion encompass the social development centres/civil committees tasked with supporting the national development plans, the Department of Community Development of the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Human Rights Commission, and the Council of Economic and Social Affairs. Additionally, the Al-Madinah Urban Observatory Network of the King Abdulaziz National Dialogue Centre, established in 2003, generates a host of quantitative and qualitative indicators on more than 23 urban areas, which allow for the monitoring of key dimensions of economic, social and human development such as education, health, employment and income as well as infrastructure, including roads, water, sewerage, and housing. The indicators are disaggregated by gender with monitoring extending to the lowest level of planning units. The Observatory promotes spatial equity to ensure equitable distribution of essential public goods and services as well as opportunities for economic investment

[21] The strategy focuses on key interventions in employment, social transfers, education, health, housing, social participation and strengthening of institutional capacity for poverty reduction and social inclusion.

and development. It also makes provision for affirmative action in the area of development planning at the provincial level, which includes favouring less developed regions. [22]

72. Recently, national dialogues on social issues have been established to engage citizens in several countries of the region of the Middle East and Northern Africa. Morocco's Commission on National Dialogue, established in 2013, includes representatives of civil society and Moroccans living abroad. It fosters discussion on the issues of empowering civil society and engaging the public in decision-making on public policy.

73. Jordan's Social Security Corporation has conducted a national dialogue on social security reform, in operation since 2006, with a wide range of national and local bodies and experts, as well as activists, trade unionists, members of civil society organizations and insured persons. They were able to evaluate the current system, highlight opportunities and challenges, and provide feedback and suggestions for reform.[23] The initiative won the International Social Security Association Good Practice Award. A national dialogue resulted in a bill passed by parliament in 2014.

IV. Initiatives of the United Nations system

74. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) promotes policy coherence at the global, national and subnational levels and assists Member States in the design of inclusive and equitable policies and regulatory frameworks which promote equal enjoyment of human rights in education, the sciences, culture, communication and information.[24] Building bridges between research, policy and practice, the UNESCO Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme promotes the transfer of relevant social sciences research findings and data to decision makers and other stakeholders, thus promoting evidence-based policymaking, nationally, regionally and internationally.[25] Within the programme, UNESCO facilitates regular gatherings of ministers for social development.

75. Within the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), participation is viewed as being part of a human rights-based approach to development. Based on international human rights standards, the approach focuses on various forms of inequality and exclusion in the political, economic and social spheres. The human rights-based approach to development both analyses the discriminatory practices, unjust power relations and processes that exacerbate the problem of exclusion and

[22] See ESCWA, "Participation and social protection in the Arab region", p. 17. See footnote 7.

[23] International Social Security Association, "National dialogue: an approach to reform social security is lot more than a line in budget, it is involvement of all", a case of the Social Security Corporation, Good Practices in Social Security, 2009.

[24] UNESCO, "Social inclusion, social transformations, social innovation: what role for UNESCO in 2014-2021?", consultations of the Director-General with member States, 23 November 2012. Available from http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/BPI/EPA/images/media_services/Director-General/ConceptNoteSocialInclusionSocialTransformationsSocialInnovationEN.pdf.

[25] See http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/most-programme/about-most/.

focuses on groups subjected to discrimination, disadvantages and exclusion (such as children, minorities and women). The human rights-based approach underscores the need for participation at every stage of the programming process, particularly of those who are disadvantaged, and underlines the responsibility of the State and its institutions with regard to respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights within its jurisdiction.[26]

76. Enhancing the political participation of youth has been the focus of the UNDP good practice guide.[27] The guide recommends practical policy changes designed to increase democratic participation of youth, such as aligning the minimum voting age with the minimum age of eligibility to run for office, and introducing youth and women's quotas in electoral laws. The guide also recommends to international organizations and civil society organizations that they encourage continuous youth participation and civic education in schools and universities; support youth-led community development and volunteering organizations; provide flexible support to innovative, small-scale youth projects; bridge the digital divide; and use online platforms for knowledge sharing and networking. Parliaments, Governments and advocacy-oriented civil society organizations can ensure youth involvement in voter education campaigns, with multimedia strategies, facilitate youth-led national youth councils, and initiate and support youth councils at local levels.

77. The World Bank, which emphasizes inclusion in markets, services and spaces, defines social inclusion as encompassing the process of improving the terms under which individuals and groups take part in society and that of improving the ability, opportunity and dignity of people who are disadvantaged on the basis of their identity with respect to their taking part.[28]

78. Increasingly, social and economic inclusion forms part of the World Bank's activities in the region of Northern Africa and the Middle East as well as of its strategy for South Asia, with a focus on improved governance and gender equality informing its work across the region. Enhancing social inclusion means improving access to, and the quality of, public services, building social cohesion, and tackling the most difficult forms of exclusion and deprivation.[29]

79. The World Bank recognizes citizen engagement as key to improving development outcomes. The aim of its recent citizen engagement initiative is to achieve full beneficiary feedback in World Bank projects. The World Bank also encourages client countries to incorporate citizen engagement mechanisms in country policies and processes. Through mediation by the Global Partnership for Social Accountability, 39 countries have agreed to the monitoring of their performance by civil society.[29]

80. The World Bank recognizes the importance of community-driven development, which gives community groups control over planning decisions and

[26] UNDP, Regional Bureau for Europe and CIS, *Regional Human Development Report: Beyond Transition — Towards Inclusive Societies*. (Bratislava, 2011). Available from http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/regional/europethecis/RBEC_HDR_2011_EN.pdf.

[27] UNDP, "Enhancing youth political participation throughout the electoral cycle: a good practice guide" (New York, January 2013). The full guide is available from http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/electoral_systemsandprocesses/enhancing-youth-political-participation-throughout-the-electoral/.html.

[28] See World Bank, *Inclusion Matters*. See footnote 1.

[29] See World Bank, *Annual Report 2014* (Washington, D.C., 2014).

investment resources for local development projects. Well-implemented community-driven development programmes tend to improve service delivery in health and education, and resource sustainability, and help communities build lower-cost and better-quality infrastructure. As they mostly target the poor and vulnerable, these programmes can help bring the voice of such groups to the policy table.[30]

81. For the World Health Organization (WHO), the concept of social exclusion provides a unique framework for understanding the social determinants of health inequalities and for developing more appropriate and effective action to address them.[31] Although the meanings of the term "social exclusion" are diverse, exclusionary processes are similar and lead to inequalities in human dignity, human rights and human health.

82. Over the past several years, WHO has contributed to incorporating the discourse on social determinants of health and health equity linked to social inclusion in the overall development agenda. The social determinants of health are:

> (C)onditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources at global, national and local levels. The social determinants of health are mostly responsible for health inequities — the unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen within and between countries.[32]

83. In the Rio Political Declaration on Social Determinantys of Health, adopted on 21 October 2011 at the World Conference on Social Determinants of Health, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 19 to 21 October 2011, Heads of Government, ministers and government representatives underscored that there were five key action areas critical to addressing health inequities, including improving governance for health and development, improving participation in policymaking and implementation, reducing health inequities and monitoring progress and increasing accountability (para. 10).[33] The WHO *Social Determinants of Health Sectoral Briefing Series* provides information on diverse policy approaches and their health impacts and focuses on areas for potential collaboration. The Series encourages a systematic dialogue and better collaboration with other areas of governance.

84. Governments have demonstrated interest in promoting equity in health policies. However, despite some efforts, health inequities are on the rise among some populations. The recent review of the literature on social determinants of health/health equity policy points to the fact that the discourse "appears to be focused on advocacy rather than analysis and that the use of policy analysis theory is extremely limited".[34]

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[30] See World Bank, *Inclusion Matters*.

[31] WHO Social Exclusion Knowledge Network, "Understanding and tackling social exclusion: final report to the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health from the Social Exclusion Knowledge Network" (February 2008), p. 185. Available from http://www.who.int/social_determinants/knowledge_networks/final_reports/sekn_final%20report_042008.pdf.

[32] See http://www.who.int/social_determinants/sdh_definition/en/.

[33] The Rio Political Declaration was endorsed by the sixty-fifth World Health Assembly on 26 May 2012 in para. 1 of its resolution WHA65.8 (see WHO, *Sixty-fifth World Health Assembly Geneva, 21-26 May 2012, Resolutions and Decisions, Annexes* (WHA65/2012/REC/1). Available from http://www.who.int/sdhconference/declaration/Rio_political_declaration.pdf.

[34] Mark G. Embrett and G. E. Randall, "Social determinants of health and health equity policy research: exploring the use, misuse, and non-use of policy analysis theory", *Social Science and Medicine*, vol. 108, issue C (2014), pp. 147-155.

85. WHO regional offices have been actively engaged in work on social determinants of health, with some establishing programmes on health determinants and risk factors in response to key public-health priorities.[35] Using the conceptual framework created by the Commission on Social Determinants of Health, the review conducted by the Regional Office for Europe of the social determinants of health identified new evidence and recommended actions for the promotion of health and reduction of health inequities which were incorporated into Health 2020, the new European policy framework for health and well-being.[36] This "whole-of-government" framework is grounded in the intersectoral coordination of health policies with policies and programmes that affect health outside the health sector.

86. A recent regional analysis of health policies in Latin America notes that the introduction of universal health coverage to improve health and its determinants was based on integrated public policies seeking to develop health systems that incorporate multisectoral intervention. Health programmes reinforced by intersectoral action and social participation have attempted to address social determinants of health, improve health outcomes and reduce health inequities. The success of those policies can be attributed to the investment in managerial and political capacity and strong political and managerial commitment.[37]

V. Conclusions and recommendations

A. Conclusions

87. **In inclusive societies, all individuals and groups are empowered to fully participate in the political, social and economic life of their communities and nations. To create such societies, it is essential to combat inequalities, through legal and structural reforms, and implement a variety of policies promoting civic participation, economic opportunities, access to services and social protection for all. It is also crucial to create institutions and structures that are conducive to the effective engagement of individuals and communities and that hold Governments accountable.**

88. **The review of recent policy development in social integration provided in this report points to the fact that social integration efforts must be based on the promotion of economic, social, civil and political rights of individuals and groups. Thus, ensuring access to basic services with equity, accessibility, availability and quality is a priority for many countries where socioeconomic inclusion programmes aim at eliminating structural causes of poverty, inequality and exclusion.**

[35] See the report dated 23 November 2012 by the Secretariat, entitled "Social determinants of health", to the WHO Executive Board at its 132nd session (EB132/14). Available from http://www.who.int/social_determinants/B_132_14-en.pdf?ua=1.

[36] Ibid., para. 6.

[37] See Luiz Odorico Monteiro de Andrade and others, "Social determinants of health, universal health coverage, and sustainable development: case studies from Latin American countries", *Lancet*, vol. 385, No. 9975 (4 April 2015). Published online 15 October 2014. Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(14)61494-X. Available from http://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(14)61494-X.pdf.

89. Access to employment and decent work represents the surest path towards economic and social integration. Thus, improving the employability of individuals through quality education and vocational training is often seen as the best means of advancing inclusion and full participation in economic life.

90. Universal or targeted social protection is increasingly viewed as central to poverty reduction and social inclusion and has become part and parcel of broader social policy design. There is also a growing recognition that the very formulation of social policies requires broad-based participation. In this context, the full range of lay and professional knowledge available through community involvement can be utilized to inform policy and action and ensure appropriate, acceptable and effective initiatives.

91. Importantly, some Governments have elaborated national plans and programmes for social inclusion and have implemented or have continued to implement, with some success, a series of interventions addressed to different target groups. Examples of good practice provided in this report aim to encourage Member States to pursue nationally appropriate policies and programmes. It is clear that social inclusion of vulnerable individuals and groups requires giving them voice and understanding their situation, which form the basis of the effective participation that is indispensable for social integration.

92. Despite some positive initiatives, however, major challenges to social inclusion remain. The persistence of discriminatory frameworks at community level, such as the caste system, points to the limits of national anti-discriminatory legislation. The continued exclusion of Roma people in Europe illustrates the difficulty inherent in building social inclusion at community level. A further challenge to social inclusion worldwide is the continuous flow of undocumented migrants and refugees who are fleeing widespread poverty and the lack of economic opportunities as well as persisting conflicts.

93. Member States have acknowledged that social integration policies and programmes are crucial for advancing social development objectives and find them relevant to their overall development efforts. Initiatives focusing on social inclusion of individuals and groups are vital to ending poverty and disempowerment and achieving other sustainable development goals. As such, they merit incorporation in the post-2015 development agenda.

B. Recommendations

Advancing inclusive societies as part of the post-2015 development agenda requires political will and concerted actions of Governments at all levels

94. Governments are urged to ensure inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making processes at all levels.

95. Governments should review all existing legal frameworks with a view to removing all discriminatory provisions so as to reduce inequalities.

96. Governments are encouraged to consider the creation and/or strengthening of national institutions for promoting social inclusion

mechanisms at national and local levels in order to ensure that nobody is left behind.

97. **Governments are encouraged to continue sharing their experience in respect of practical initiatives at national level designed to promote economic, civil and political participation and anti-discrimination and other measures for advancing social integration.**

98. **Governments may consider a systematic exchange of good practices in social integration at regional and international levels so that policymakers and other stakeholders can apply them to their national circumstances and step up progress towards achieving a "society for all".**